



If there is an artist who refuses to talk, it is Chhatrapati Dutta. Given the option, he wouldn't even title his works.

Art is what a viewer creates," says this 43-year-old Bangalore-born artist. "It is not necessarily what goes into making it." Almost reluctantly, his baritone barely audible, Dutta elaborates on his philosophy while putting the finishing touches to a clay human head with a zipper running around it. At first glance it looks like an advertising mannequin waiting to be shot for a billboard rather than a piece of sculpture. But if one were to read into it and correlate it with Dutta's concerns, the zipper is all about artificial divisions and unifications. A series of 19th-century English ballads printed on huge pieces of vinyl boards stand against the wall and a lifesize donkey wrapped in Victorian crochet lace gazes at the rain-splashed lawn in Artspace, a residency studio for artists in Baruipur on the outskirts of Kolkata, where Dutta was living and working for months for an installation show at Akar Prakar Gallery in August-September, 2007.

Chhatrapati Dutta

Breaking Barriers

By RUMA DASGUPTA



Couple-A Social Construct, installation.

Paintings, sculpture, photography, multimedia, performance, shot footage and found objects are all brought together by Dutta, not necessarily with surface beauty, but more often with large doses of satire and even black humor. He has broken the barrier of the flat canvas and has explored the role of an artist in the way he delineates his concerns. He dealt with institutionalized violence and individual freedom in "Bone Mill Tales," which he mounted a year ago at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture in Kolkata. It was breathtaking in its scale and intensity, bringing together video art, performance art and sculpture with unexpected combinations of sound bites and images.

"I use metaphors and signifiers in my works. In my recent pieces, suggestive texts and lines indicative of maps and territories have played a significant role," Dutta volunteers, at last opening up to verbal communication.

His map series of paintings were shown in July-August 2007 at TamarindArt Gallery in New York, together with "Kaar land?" It is his take on a controversial car project conflict in West Bengal. Dutta used the event to explore the bloody history of land ownership that has been a part of the story of mankind since primitive times. "Kaar," which is a pun on car, when translated into his mother tongue, Bengali, means whose, and typically, the question is left open.

Last summer's showcase of works by Dutta and four other young Indian artists, called "Of Images and Illusions," was curated by Dipanjana Danda at TamarindArt, founded by Marguerita and Kent Charugundla. The gallery in midtown Manhattan was inaugurated in 2003 by Indian artist MF Hussain, who also appeared for the "Of Images and Illusions" opening, which showcased the work of Pappu Bardhan, Chandrima Bhattacharyya, Pratul Dash and Mahjabin Majumdar, as well as Dutta.

In the first quarter of 2008, Dutta's works will appear in a solo show



Glorious City, painting.



Bone Mill Tales, installation.

at TamarindArt. He will deal with concerns about space—geographical, psychological and sexual—that have engaged him since he started his journey as an artist, after he earned a first-class Master's degree in painting from Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan in West Bengal.

Initially, Dutta opted to experiment with glass as his surface. He mastered the art of painting on the reverse side, in the reverse order, starting off with the last layer and working inwards rather than outwards. Perhaps the practice was a reflection of the inherent nature of his exploratory process. For him the process is as much the work as the finished effort.

"I would like to spend some time in New York," says Dutta, "before I get down to doing anything on canvas for viewers in the U.S. The nuances of the American experience can re-skew my exploration of the dilemma of the individual against the collective."

Dutta grew up soaking in images from Hollywood films and hero worshipping actor-director Charlie Chaplin, as well as American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. The concept of individual freedom was imbibed early through exposure to the youth movements of the 1960s and anti-Vietnam War campaigns.

In a recent painting called "The Screen," Dutta comments on freedom of speech.

"How can freedom of speech mean anything if the voices don't reach anywhere?" asks Dutta, an uncharacteristic flash of impa-

tience crossing his otherwise still face. Looking for an answer perhaps, he goes back to the firing oven, where another chapter in his exploration of the dichotomies of the times is taking shape.

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